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"Not Your Average Speakers" Share Urban Vision

DIANE EGNER | TUESDAY, OCTOBER 01, 2013



Imagine a day in the not-too-distant future when downtown Tampa buzzes with people who call Encore!, the Channel District and Tampa's Riverwalk home. A day when an upscale urban shopping market or food hub becomes a destination for residents as well as tourists.

A day when choosing among new apartments in the center of the city for \$900 to \$1,500 a month isn't out of the question. A day when automobile drivers habitually slow for pedestrians and bicycles, when the Green Artery connects downtown neighborhoods with well-lighted paths and the Hillsborough River and Bay waters are lined with restaurants, boats and playgrounds.

That highly urban, highly accessible scene was on the minds of a panel of doers making progress on the ground as *83 Degrees Media* invited "Not Your Average Speakers" and our readers to engage in conversation about what's new and what's next for downtown Tampa.

**Listen To The Buzz!**

The Sept. 26th gathering at the Encore! Tampa planned community buzzes with energy as people make connections, consider collaborations and generally take the opportunity to share their visions for what could be and what more is needed to shape reality.

Once Tampa nurtures more housing options and creates a robust transit system, "we'll create the density necessary to rub elbows in passing on the street," says Keith Greminger, an architect and urban planner with Kimley Horn. "That's what urban living is all about."

He urges city lovers to get engaged in the Invision Tampa process and think big about downtown's potential along with opportunities along the west bank of the Hillsborough River and neighborhoods north of downtown.

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"Mayor Buckhorn 'gets it' as a student of urban planning from way back," Greminger says. "I'm also a big proponent of what Ed Turanchik (a former Hillsborough County commissioner and longtime champion for urban living) is trying to do" to create a water ferry transportation system.

### Creating A Walkable, Bike-Friendly City

Andrew Blikken, a [bike-sharing advocate](#) and instigator, who is helping the city create a high-tech system for making bicycles available and traceable for work and leisure around town, points to Beach Drive in St. Petersburg as a model for urban vibrancy that could be duplicated in downtown Tampa with proper encouragement.

He urges Tampa to go after a new stadium for the Rays not so much as a boon for its downtown, but as a boon for St. Petersburg's downtown, believing that Johns Hopkins, USF and other medical innovators could invest in the existing stadium site to create a medical research and healthcare delivery complex similar to what is growing in Orlando around Lake Nona.

"Why not create a medical complex in downtown Tampa around [USF's CAMLs project](#)?" an audience member enthuses.

### Growing Up, Growing Big

Franklin Street and specifically the now vacant Kress and Grant buildings could one day be home to an upscale market similar to the [Oxbow Public Market](#) in Napa Valley or the [Baltimore Food Hub](#) that engages culinary classes to create and sell edible wares, suggests Jeannette Jason, a co-owner of the buildings who is seeking investors and developers to revive the property as the retail center of the city.

Jason is meeting with ideators, creatives and innovators to consider options and aims to have plans take off in the next year or so across Florida Avenue from the renovation now underway of the [Classic Federal Courthouse](#) into a boutique hotel.

Such a market would be supported by new tenants in the Residences at the Riverwalk, an apartment tower planned by Developer Greg Minder and [UHSI](#) next to the [Straz Center](#) and the [Patel Conservatory](#). The biggest challenge he and other developers face, Minder says, is balancing the economics of costs and demand for parking.

"People used to bar hop on roller skates in downtown Tampa," says Minder. "We need that back -- bar hopping on roller skates" and other innovative fun activities that attract people sans their automobiles.

"Greg's project will be a catalyst for the whole north end of downtown," Greminger says. "It will create waterfront opportunities that we haven't seen yet."

Urban Pioneer Michelle Deatherage, who opened [Duckweed Urban Market](#) to solve the problems created by the lack of a grocery store downtown, says the intangible benefits of building community far outweigh the investment required. When people see each other regularly, walk their dogs together and engage in conversation, the vibrancy of urban living surpasses all other values. Duckweed provides the urban space to build community as well as provide groceries within easy walking distance even in the heat of summer.

### Focusing On Shaping The Future

Most encouraging for Moderator John Dicks II, an attorney at [Akerman in Tampa](#), and participants and sponsors of the event: Conversation at the "Not Your Average Speakers" event started well before and continued well past the formal gathering and is still going on, say hosts LeRoy Moore of [Encore!](#) Tampa and the Tampa Housing Authority, and Christine Burdick of the Tampa Downtown Partnership.

The speakers series serves as a catalyst for thought, a generator of new ideas and a place where people who might not know each other can find their peeps



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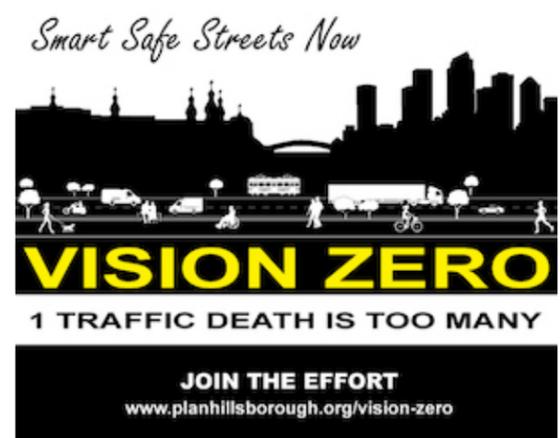


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and seek opportunities to work together, Burdick says.

Sponsor underwriters for the events include the [Tampa Downtown Partnership](#), the [Tampa Housing Authority](#), [PNC Bank](#), [MOSI Tampa](#), [Baker Barrios](#) and [Tucker Hall](#).

*Diane Egner, the managing editor and publisher of 83 Degrees Media, creates and coordinates the "Not Your Average Speakers" events along with assistance from [White Book Agency](#). Comments? Contact [83 Degrees](#).*



Read more articles by [Diane Egner](#).

Diane Egner is the publisher and managing editor at 83 Degrees Media in the Tampa Bay region of Florida.

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**Anneliese Meier** · Works at Self-Employed

Exciting news. I would love to bike downtown once again - or to Ybor, as I did 20 years ago. I would also take a trolley. There are beautiful buildings in downtown Tampa and if they cannot be renovated perhaps the facades can be saved. As far as the Urban Food movement - have any large-scale local agriculture entities been involved yet? Such as folks from the Wishnowski farms?

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**Iris Barrientos** · Realtor at BEX Realty

Great news. Very happy to hear!

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**Coast Bike Share**

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